

**the more things
change**

trvshmouths

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Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Alternate Universe - No Pennywise (IT), F/M, M/M, inspired by iconic britney spears film crossroads, it's a road trip au, its been established pennywise ain't out here, no one dies except for georgie - that's still canon sorry bro - minus the way he died obviously, pennywise WHOM??? not in my coming of age friendship story, thats probably important to mention too

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Stamley Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, big bro7 vibes, heavy focus on the losers club friendship, lots of stozier friendship because i'm weak for it

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Summary:

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They had been twelve, he thinks. Him, Ben, Richie, Eddie, Mike, Bill, and Bev. The quarry had already become their spot, in a way. A place to escape together, where they'd swim or just sit around and be dumb kids.

He can't remember whose idea the box had been. The wish box, they'd called it. They'd all written down a dream they had for their

future selves. A wish, a goal, anything they wanted to accomplish. Stan couldn't remember what he had written down if he tried. And he can't say he's particularly bothered to find out.

// The Losers grew distant as they became teenagers, but a box and wishes from their past send them on a road trip together.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

honesty hour: i was going to post this whole story all at once as soon as it was complete. and a large portion of it is already done. but my over-critical ass couldn't stop going back and overthinking and rewriting what i already had. so i said fuck it, i'm not gonna be able to go on until i post something and get this out there so i can't edit it anymore.

this stemmed from two things. 1) i love crossroads. 2) i was working on a reddie au but kept wanting to write about stan. so i had to do something from his pov immediately.

so here we are, friends. the crossroads au no one asked for.

Stanley didn't even want to go to the prom.

He'd managed to avoid going the year prior, but his excuses and dodging hadn't worked this time. So somehow, he ends up in a cheap, rented tux, his purple tie matching Patricia's dress, sitting in a crowded room, listening to top 40 music he doesn't even like that much.

"It's our senior prom, Stan!" she had said a few weeks ago, shaking him by his shoulders. "I'm not allowing you to skip out."

Peer pressure is a very real thing.

He spends a lot of the night eating pretzels and watching Patty dance with a group of other girls. He loves her, wouldn't have agreed to be her date if he didn't, but he's not much for dancing. Not in public, anyway. He agrees, eventually, to a few slow dances since those are

easy enough, because she started to pout and Stan can't deal with seeing his friends sad.

His *friend*. Singular. Her. Patty's kind of his only real friend nowadays.

He has other people in his life. The guys and girls they rode to prom with, the guys who sat with him because none of them wanted to dance either. He'll sit by them at lunch or in class, tag along on group trips to the movies, but that's really it. They're Patty's friends, not his. Stan doesn't even think they like him too much, and they're truthfully not his favorite people either, but they're there. Their presence prevents him from feeling like too much of a loser.

Despite the feeling that the night would suck or something would go wrong, it's nearly over and the worst that's happened is him stepping on Patty's toes a couple times during their first dance. In fact, by the time they announce the last song and he's watching Patty and her friend Kay swirl around to a Taylor Swift song, he thinks he'd chalk this night up to a success.

That is until he looks up and sees Ben Hanscom standing in front of him.

Sweet, smiling Ben Hanscom, looking handsome in his suit, shouldn't make Stan weary or nervous, but he does. Because he can't imagine why he'd be walking over to him, not when it's been so long since they've been what Stan would consider friends.

Ben used to be his friend. One of his best. There was never any sort of fight or falling out, and they exchanged smiles if ever they came in contact, but it's been nearly three years since the last time they had a real conversation. They're far past casual greetings and talking unless they need to, so seeing Ben in front of him raises all sorts of red flags for Stanley.

"Hey, Stan," he says, smiling.

Stan's cautious, but still can't help but smile back. Ben may have changed a lot during high school - growing taller, gaining muscle,

getting bullied less and garnering a more positive kind of attention. But his his kind eyes and gentle tone remain the same.

He briefly wonders who Ben is here with. His new friends? A new girl? Him and Bev were still Facebook official last Stan checked, but admittedly, it's been a long while since he's checked. He can't say long distance relationships sound realistic to him, especially in high school, but he wants to hope for the best for those two.

"Hey, Ben," he says, brow furrowing to express his confusion without having to voice it. "What's up?"

Ben doesn't make Stan wait long for an explanation. "Mike's waiting for us."

Stan just blinks up at him. Ben stares back.

It takes him a second too long to realize who Ben is talking about - he knows a lot of guys called Mike - and he feels bad about it instantly. But even as memories of their old friend come back to him, he has no idea why Ben would be coming to tell him Mike's waiting for them. Or why Mike would be waiting for them at all.

"Waiting for us?" he repeats.

Ben looks disappointed. "Yeah. At the quarry. I thought you'd remember."

That comment makes him feel bad, and he doesn't even know what he's feeling bad about. "I'm sorry." He apologizes anyway. "Why is Mike waiting for us at the quarry? And who's 'us' exactly? Me and you? Why?"

He remembers the quarry, though he hasn't been back since... Wow. Maybe when he was fourteen? Definitely over four years ago now. He's pretty sure the Richie and Eddie fight that took place there kind of tainted it for everyone. He knows he's only been back once or twice since, and it wasn't by choice.

(He's always been susceptible to peer pressure.)

"All of us," Ben tells him. "It's prom night. We're digging up our box."

It takes a second, but then suddenly vivid memories of who and what Ben is talking about come to him.

They had been twelve, Stan thinks. Maybe even eleven, but he thinks twelve. Him, Ben, Richie, Eddie, Mike, Bill, and Bev. The quarry had already become their spot, in a way. A place to escape together, where they'd swim or just sit around and be dumb kids. If they weren't out riding their bikes, or having sleepovers in Bill's basement, or at the arcade, they were at the quarry.

He can't remember whose idea the box had been. The wish box, they'd called it. He thinks maybe Bev's, or even Mike's, but they'd all written down a dream they had for their future selves. A wish, a goal, anything they wanted to accomplish. Something they wanted for the older version of themselves. Stan couldn't remember what he had written down if he tried. And he can't say he's particularly bothered to find out.

"I have to take Patty home," he says. "Sorry."

He feels like he should feel worse about not wanting to go. The look on Ben's face does dig at him still, but not enough to make him want to go. It'll be tense and weird, he already knows, and he doesn't want to sit around with a bunch of strangers and think about his childhood.

"You can drop her off on the way to the quarry," Ben tells him - which Stan had not expected in the slightest. When had Ben gotten so pushy? "You have to go, Stan."

Stan doesn't say anything at first, his brain running through excuses and ways to get out of this. Unfortunately, it's like Ben can sense that.

"Please, Stanley," Ben sighs.

"It's just a box, Ben," he tries to say in the least harsh way possible. "Probably filled with a bunch of gibberish anyway. We were kids."

"This was so important to us all," Ben reminds him. "Bill even wanted to do a blood pact as a promise we'd all show up. We can't do it

without everyone."

He remembers that. He remembers Eddie refusing to let anyone near him with dirty broken glass, and then Richie told Bill he was a "weird, bloodthirsty fuck" for even having the idea, and it was quickly dropped. But Stan had been willing. There was a point in time when Stan would have done anything Bill Denbrough told him to, but he thinks that's mostly true for all of them.

It's probably no coincidence that once Bill split from the group, it was the beginning of the end for the loser's club.

"We're not all here to do it anyway," Stan says. "Bev doesn't even live in Derry anymore."

He's not trying to argue, but he needs to make a point. If Bev's not there, Stan should be able to be absent, too. It's only fair.

Ben steps aside and stares out at the sea of people, which is significantly smaller than it had been when he first arrived, what with people leaving for motels or after parties. Whatever people did after prom. He hadn't been invited to anything, he doesn't know. After a moment, Ben finds who he had been looking for, and points them out. There's Bev, talking to Eddie Kaspbrak and some redhead Stan doesn't think he's ever seen before.

He doesn't know what to say, he had not been expecting Bev to appear like that. He feels another stab of guilt for not even noticing that one of his oldest friends has been in the same room as him all night.

"She skipped her own prom, made the trip to be my school dance date one last time - and to dig up the box."

That seems to answer the question about if they're together still or not, which for some reason Stan is really relieved to hear. Maybe it's just nice to see that two of them managed to stay in touch after all this time.

"Has everyone else agreed to this?" he asks. He can't imagine they have. "I really don't think Richie will say yes. And Bill - Bill's not even

here tonight."

"Mike went to talk to Bill," Ben tells him, and Stan really wishes Ben wasn't so prepared to counter him on every point he brought up. "Eddie seemed willing when I left them, and Richie's already agreed."

He's mostly surprised Richie agreed, but it makes him nervous again, too. Just thinking about being around Richie and Eddie after their fight made him tense up.

Bill's departure from the group had started the domino effect, and may have been the hardest for Stan, but Eddie's left them all hurting in a different way. Everyone else faded away slowly, naturally in a way. It took awhile for them to even notice the distance. With Eddie, it was all at once. A bandaid ripped off quick with no warning that left them all stinging. Overnight, they went from best friends to nothing.

Eddie feel his eyes on him, because he looks over and catches Stan looking in his direction. He gives him a wry smile. Bev turns, too, and gives a warmer one. Stan forces a smile back.

He doesn't want to go.

Nothing will make him want to go.

But he knows he has to.

By the time he drops off Patty, gives her a goodnight kiss on the cheek, and arrives at the quarry, everyone else is already there. Seeing the other six huddled together, albeit awkwardly now, gives him a sense of déjà vu. It's weird seeing them all grown up there now, instead of twelve and in their underwear.

So fucking weird.

"Ah, fuck you!" is how Richie greets him as he starts walking towards them, and he definitely feels thirteen again. "I owe Haystack ten

bucks now 'cause I said you were gonna pussy out."

"Sorry, I guess," he says as he approaches. "I can leave."

"No," Ben says. "No leaving. Ignore Richie."

"We all do," Eddie mumbles.

He looks around at everyone, in their nice suits and fancy dresses. Even Mike, even though he's been homeschooled since before they met, and he's almost positive he wasn't at their school's prom. Then again, maybe he did go as someone's date. Stan hadn't even noticed Bev all night. The only one not in prom wear is Bill, wearing jeans and a green flannel. At least Stan had been right about that. Bill hadn't been there.

"Can we get this over with now we're all finally here?" Eddie asks. *Yeah, he sounds very willing*, Stan thinks. "Who remembers where we even buried this thing?"

"I do," Mike says, stepping away and gesturing for them all to follow.

So they do.

It's mostly rock and moss, so finding the patch of soil where they'd buried it wasn't difficult. Someone had come prepared with a shovel, Ben or Mike probably, and it only takes a few minutes to unearth it.

The wish box sounds more magical than it looks. It's an old shoe box that Stan thinks may have belonged to Bill, that they'd wrapped in a few plastic bags to protect it. They hadn't even decorated the box, other than someone writing 'LOSERS CLUB ONLY - OPEN AND DIE' on the top in blue marker.

Bev carries it back to where they'd been, so they could sit in a circle and open it together. She pulls the lid off and Stan leans forward to look inside. There was a rainbow of different colored envelopes with everyone's name on one, and everyone reaches in to pull theirs out. Stan waits until everyone else has pulled their hands out until he moves for his.

No one talks. Not as they dig it up, not as they walk back. The silence

is so, so loud.

"Okay," Bev finally says, looking around. "Who wants to go first?"

"What do you mean?" Richie asks. "Why can't we just open them all at once? It doesn't have to be a fucking sharing circle."

"Why? You write something stupid that you're embarrassed by?" Stan asks, because bickering with Richie stills comes naturally even though it shouldn't.

He doesn't mean to sound harsh. It's Richie, he assumes he of all people can take a joke.

But Richie just scoffs at him. "As if I remember what I wrote in this dumb thing."

"You didn't have to come, you know," Eddie snaps.

"And miss the chance to see your sweet little sunshine face one last time? I wouldn't dream of it, Eds."

Eddie glares at him, but Bill thankfully speaks up before a real fight can start up. "Eddie, you *just* said you wanted to get this over with."

"I'll go first!" Bev shouts just loud enough to be heard over them.

Stan is silently thankful for her pushing things along and stopping this from falling apart so quickly. He's surprised at how nice it is to have her around, but maybe he shouldn't be. He'd always thought she was much too cool to hang out with them.

His eyes settle on where she's sat on his right and he watches as she opens her red envelope and pulls out what looks to be a ripped off section of notebook paper. Not even a whole piece, but like someone had carelessly torn a chunk off the corner of a piece.

"What's it say, Bev?" Ben asks gently from the other side of her.

She pauses, as if she's reading it to herself again, then says out loud, "Get out of my house."

Everyone's quiet as they seem to remember at once all Bev had gone through. Ben puts his arm around her shoulders and pulls her in to kiss her head. It'd been sad when Bev moved, but none of them could be selfish about that. They wanted her away from her dad even if it meant she had to move away to live with her aunt. The loss was worth it. Even when keeping in touch through phone calls and online became less frequent, they knew she was safe now, and it was all any of them wanted.

"Overachiever," Richie says, but he's smiling. "Your thing came true like, less than two years after we did this. You didn't fuck around."

Most of them laugh, including Bev. Her dad passed away recently, Stan heard, but she doesn't seem too broken up about it. He can't say he blames her.

"Mike? You wanna go?" she asks.

He nods, ripping open the orange envelope to find another chunk of notebook paper. He reads it out loud as he reads it for the first time. "Leave Derry and move to Florida."

"Like, after high school?" Bill asks.

Mike shrugs. "I don't really remember. I think so. I think the plan was to finish school and get out of here right away. It seemed more realistic back then, when I thought I could just ditch all my responsibilities and start a new life somewhere else."

It was Mike's responsibilities that caused him to fade from the others in the first place. He got a little older, and so did his grandfather. He had grown more capable and was needed more and more at the farm, and since they didn't get the chance to see him in school, they rarely got to hang out anymore at all.

At first, he met up with them when he could, but eventually, he was busy each time they called, or they were busy each time he did. Then the calls stopped coming altogether.

"Why Florida?" Ben asks.

Another shrug as he laughs. "I think it's just somewhere I always

wanted to go for some reason. The beaches always looked nice..."

"Um, yeah, that's mine, too," Richie announces to them. Everyone's heads jerk in his direction. He had opened his without them noticing. "Not the Florida part. The getting the hell out of Derry part. It's what I wanted. Fuck. Still do."

Stan tries to glance at the paper in Richie's grasp, but he pulls it away before he can read it, shoving it inside of his suit jacket. Stan can't be certain, but he has a feeling Richie's lying. Once upon a time, Stan wouldn't have hesitated to call him out on it, but now he just sits there in silence.

Losing Richie's friendship had happened so slowly that he almost hadn't even noticed it. There had been no fight, nothing in particular that put them at odds. By the time they all started high school, their group really only consisted of him, Richie, and Ben. It was a bigger school, they had different classes, busier schedules. They met new people. By sophomore year, the three of them just didn't talk anymore.

Richie's absence in his life had stung at times though. Of all the losers, they'd been friends longer than anyone. When he finally did notice how distant they had grown, it felt like it was too late to save it, and Richie seemed happier with his new friends anyway. He had been Stan's first best friend, someone he stupidly had thought would be in his life forever. Now he's old enough to know better.

"Next?" Mike looks around.

Stan avoids eye contact.

"I'll go, I guess," Bill offers.

Stan's eyes stay fixated on his fingers as they slide under the seal and tear open the blue envelope.

When he pulls his paper out and reads it, he smiles a little. "I think I cheated. I put two things. I wanted to lose my stutter, and publish a book."

"One out of two ain't bad," Bev grins at him.

Considering Bill's stutter had been at it's worst when they last saw each other as friends, it really is impressive that he's managed to get it under control. It says something about Bill's recovery. Or maybe Stan just wants it to. He knows how bad Bill's mental state was when they parted ways that summer. His little brother going missing had taken a toll on him and no one had known how to help him. But they tried, god did they try.

Stan was at his doorstep everyday trying to get him out of the house. And for awhile, he still saw his friends, went on bike rides and went swimming with them. But it was clear he was distant. Not just from them, but from the entire world. He wasn't Bill anymore, and it was the hardest thing in the world to watch.

When Georgie's body was found, Bill shut his friends out completely. He'd been surviving on nothing but hope, and that hope was gone. His brother's death was nothing more than an accident, but he blamed himself anyway. Stan looks at Bill and wonders if he still blames himself, or if, with age, has come the realization that there was nothing he could have done to stop what happened. He wasn't there. He didn't know what his brother was off doing. The storm that day had taken a victim and there was no human being to blame for that. Especially not Bill.

No one gave up on Bill. They invited him to every birthday party, every movie night that now took place at Ben's house, every weekend bike ride to the quarry. Even when the others realized it was a lost cause, Stan didn't stop sending invitations or riding past his house in hopes of... something. In hopes of *anything*.

Bill had been their leader in a way - brave and confident and willing to take charge. Stan wasn't the only one who had admired him. But for some reason, he just couldn't give up so easily. Maybe because he was the first friend Stan ever lost or grew distant from. Maybe because he'd always felt different around him. There'd always been something so special about Bill Denbrough. Still is. When that bright light in his eyes went out, Stan felt something dull within himself as well.

"One out of two ain't bad," Bill repeats in agreement, smiling. "The other one's never gonna happen anyway. I haven't written in..." His smile dims. "I don't know. Years."

"You were always a really good writer, Bill," Stan whispers, and Bill looks at him, and they both smile. "You won that writing competition when we were ten. Richie was so pissed."

Richie throws his arms up. "Because my story was hilarious! It was so much better!" There's no heat or ill intent behind his words. Some of the group may be cold to one another nowadays, but not to Bill. Never to Bill.

"What was yours about?" Mike asks.

"Richie's story was about a group of kids who bullied a clown to death," Eddie answers for him. "It would never have won anything. We were nine and you were framing murder and bullying in a positive light-

"Yeah, the bullying and murder of a *killer clown*, Edward!" Richie argues. "It was a positive message!"

"It had heart, but it was a little dark," Ben adds.

Richie shakes his head. "No appreciation for the arts, you uncultured fucks."

"Do you want to write again?" Stan asks Bill, regretting bringing Richie's clown story up. He thought he'd be less... *passionate* about it nowadays.

Bill shrugs, then nods. "Yeah. I just haven't been able to. I started a few things, but they never went anywhere. I always lost my direction, so I just... gave up."

"It's never too late to pick up where you left off with any of them," Bev offers. "I'm sure anything you write would be magic."

Stan has to agree, nodding.

Bill smiles. "Thanks, guys."

They hear the sound of paper ripping and glance over at Eddie. "Can I open mine now?" he asks, though he clearly already has. That eagerness is visibly dulled as he reads what he has inside. His lips purse together as he stares at it, shifting a little.

"What's it say, Eddie?" Bev asks. Cautious and kind.

"Um, it says I want to quit being babied by my mom, and stop taking the placebos. Mine didn't come true either, I guess..." He then cracks a smile. "It also says I want Bev and Richie to stop smoking, especially around me."

Most of them laugh a little, and Bev glances a little guiltily at her bag on the ground. "Well. *That* hasn't happened just quite yet."

"I have," Richie tells them. "I stopped a year ago."

"Shocking," Eddie mutters. "Every time I saw you, you had one of those cancer sticks dangling out of your mouth."

"Because you stressed me out."

Eddie rolls his eyes. "You were going to develop a black lung at the rate you were going, it's good you stopped."

"Oh, like you care," Richie mumbles.

The tension is thick and Stan feels a ping of regret for showing up.

"Bev, you're gonna stop, too," Eddie points a finger at her, ignoring Richie.

"I've been trying to get her to," Ben says, shaking his head and nudging her shoulder with his own.

She puts her hands up in defense. "I know, I know. It's hard, okay?" She changes the subject back to Eddie quickly. "Eddie, I thought you stood up to your mom about the medicine."

"Yeah, so did I," Bill frowns.

So did Stan. The last time they all hung out as a group, he was still

using his inhaler and taking his one other genuine prescription, but that was it. After the girl at the pharmacy told him the truth about his medications, and with some encouragement from his friends, Eddie had told his mom he wasn't going to take them anymore. He wasn't going to let her control him and make him scared of the world.

"She convinced me to start taking them again," he shrugs, looking down like he's ashamed. "I think she's right about some of the stuff, you know? I mean, I've been healthy because of her looking out for me, nothing bad has happened-"

"Your mom would make a great cult leader," Richie interrupts him. "Really good at this brainwashing shit."

Eddie glares at him. "Shut the fuck up, Richie. Just shut up."

"It's hard to break away from your parents," Bev says, and Richie doesn't say anything more. "Even if they're... the way parents can be."

Stan nods. He can't say his father was ever as bad as Bev's, or even Eddie's mom, but there was - and still is - a lot of control and pressure in the Uris household that Stanley always worries he's going to crack under. Even if he doesn't agree with his dad, he doesn't go against him. It's why he's going to the college he is in the fall, it's why's choosing from a list of majors his parents deemed good enough for him. Twelve or eighteen, no matter the age, it's easy to feel defenseless against the people who raised you.

"Who's left?" Mike asks, looking around at everyone.

Stan clutches his envelope in his hand and looks around at everyone else. Only him and Ben have unopened envelopes. They seem to notice this at the same time and meet eyes. Stan raises his brows and tips his head forward at him, giving him the silent go ahead to go first. *Please, go first.* He does.

Ben tears the purple envelope open and start to pull his wish out. "I think I may remember what I wrote."

"I hope yours says 'lose weight and get hot' so at least one more of our dumbass wishes could have come true," Richie says.

Ben pulls the paper from his envelope and reads it to himself before flipping it around for the others to see. "I wanted to build a house."

Richie lets out a loud, high-pitched noise that's a mix between a laugh and a sound of disbelief. "What the fuck kind of child were you?"

"I like architecture," Ben explains simply, shrugging.

"You're going to school for it, right?" Stan asks, remembering seeing him post about it when he got accepted. Ben always was into building things, whether it was elaborate school projects or the attempted treehouse in his backyard. He's not surprised it's still a passion for him.

Ben smiles, nodding. "Yeah. In Portland."

"I can't believe you two are still together," Eddie says, looking between them, all of them knowing the reason Ben chose Portland was because that's where Bev lives now. "You were like infants when you met."

Bev laughs, leaning against Ben's side. "I think we were a little older than that, but..." She shrugs. "When you know, you know. You make it work for true love."

Stan nods as if he knows anything about true love, but says nothing. Not until Mike says his name, making him look up.

"Last up," he says, and Stan gives a smile.

His fingers gently slide under the yellow fold, and braces himself for whatever stupid or embarrassing wish his child brain dreamed up. Instead of cringing as he reads it, he feels a burn behind his eyes and a tightness in his throat.

'I wish for us to be friends forever,' the paper reads, and he resists the urge to ball it up in his hand.

"Another one that didn't come true," he tells him all, staring at it.

Richie leans over to read it, laughing a humorless laugh in his ear. "Friends forever," he reads. "I wouldn't have guessed yours would be the sappy one, Stanley."

"That's what it says?" Bev asks, leaning over as well. A sad smile spreads on her face as she reads it. "I wish for us to be friends forever."

A silence falls over them as Stan's wish hits all of them. It's stupid, he thinks. His parents weren't friends with any of the kids they went to middle school with. Why would Stan and his friends be any different? People drifted apart. They grew up. It doesn't matter. He feels dumb for ever writing that and letting himself believe.

He stands up, brushing his hands on his pants. "Well. We did it. I guess we're done."

Bev reaches up, putting a hand on his wrist. "Stan, it was a sweet wish," she says knowingly.

"A sweet wish that didn't come true," he tells her, but lets himself be tugged back down into a sitting position even though all he wants to do is get out of there.

"To be fair, none of our wishes came true," Bill says.

Stan presses his lips into a thin line. That's not the truth, but he doesn't want to fight Bill when he knows he's trying to make him feel better.

Richie does though.

"Half of yours did, actually," he says. "And Bev's did. And like, a third of Eddie's. But fuck. Out of seven of us... Not a good turn out." He shakes his head, laughing a little. "God, we really are a bunch of losers."

"We all still have time," Mike says, looking around at everyone. "No one's dreams are far-fetched."

Stan tilts his head at him, silently telling him that yeah. His kind of is. The forever friendship ship has sailed.

"No one's," Mike repeats, staring back at him. The genuine tone in his voice makes Stan look away. A mix of guilt and hope and dread for whatever Mike may mean by that fills his gut. "We have one summer left," Mike continues. "One summer until we don't even have the chance to reunite like this. We'll all be off at college, or at our full time jobs. We all forgot about this box, something that was so important to us when we did it. How long until we forget each other completely?"

"I couldn't forget you guys," Bill speaks up.

"You say that now," Mike shakes his head. "You didn't remember the pact either."

Bill doesn't say anything else, just nods. Mike's not saying it to be harsh, it's just true. Most of them hadn't remembered.

"What are you getting at?" Eddie asks.

"Let's not waste the summer," he continues. "We were all best friends once. Losing you guys sucked. I want to try and make Stan's wish come true. I want to make all of them come true."

Richie snorts again, and Eddie rolls his eyes.

Ben puts a hand up to silence them before they can get started. "Guys, listen to him. All of our wishes doable."

"What are you suggesting, exactly?" Eddie asks. "Because I don't see how we can all get together and in one summer, turn Bill into a published author, move all of us out of this town? No fucking way am I helping anyone build a house. Do you know how dangerous construction sites are? Sorry, but I-"

"Can you just hear him out?" Bev cuts him off. "He's right. We used to want the world for one another and now you're not even willing to listen to an idea Mike has? I don't think he's saying let's spend the summer building a house, or get Bill some sort of book deal. But why shouldn't we do all we can to push each other forward?"

"Fine," Eddie gives in. "How would we do that then?"

Mike shrugs. "I suggest a road trip."

Stan knows this is a bad idea, already coming up with excuses to get out of it before it's even agreed on. Not that he thinks it will be.

"Fuck, I do love road trips," Richie says.

Or maybe it fucking will be. Great. He wishes he was still a kid and could use the excuse that his mom said no. He's of legal age and capable of making his own decisions now. Unfortunate.

"We can go to Florida," Ben adds on, and Mike beams. "There's Mike and Richie's wishes checked off right away. Get out of Derry, even if it's just for a couple weeks. Mike can see the beach."

"What about the others?" Bev asks, not challenging, just curious. Stan can tell she's already on board by the light in her eyes and the smile on her face.

"Maybe Bill can find inspiration again," Mike says. "Reuniting with old friends, going to new surroundings. Could be good for the muse. Right, Bill?"

Bill pauses before he smiles a little, nodding. "It could be."

"And Eddie," Ben jumps back in. He nods to Bev. "Maybe me and you can use this summer to get her to stop smoking."

"And maybe we can get you away from your mom and off those meds," Bev adds.

Eddie shifts, clearly back to believing in stuff his mom has fed him. It's sad, and Stan can't help but feel for him.

"Yeah," Eddie finally says. "Maybe."

"What about you though?" Richie asks, eyes on Ben. "Your school's in Portland, not Florida. And I hate to agree with Eddie, but I don't want to help you build a house, Haystack. What do you get out of this?"

Ben looks at Stan. "I want what Stan wants."

"*Wanted*," he corrects him. "I was twelve when I wrote that."

If Ben takes offense, he hides it well, still smiling. "Well, I want it now." He stands up and puts his hand out into the middle of the circle. "Me and Mike are going to Florida this summer. Who else is coming?"

Mike, of course, is the first to stand and put his hand on top of Ben's. Bev is next. For a long second, no one else joins in.

Then, Eddie's speaking.

"I'll have to ask my mom," he mumbles. "But..." He stands and his hand goes in.

Without a word, Richie's hand is on top of Eddie's.

"Bill? Stan?" Bev looks back at them. Stan's eyes meet Bill's as Bill stands hesitantly. He doesn't stretch his hand out immediately, but he does do it.

Just like he didn't want to go to prom, or go to the quarry tonight, Stan doesn't want to go on this trip.

And just like prom, and just like the quarry, he finds himself giving in anyway.

A group chat is formed - and in the process, Stan realizes he didn't even have Eddie or Mike's numbers anymore. But that's fixed quickly, and within a week, plans are made. The drive from Derry, Maine to Orlando, Florida was almost exactly a 24 hour journey that they planned to make in a straight shot, all of them taking turns driving. Ben's mom was letting them borrow her car, because it was the only one that'd fit all of them, with it's middle and back seat. Stan personally didn't see the problem with them taking two cars, but apparently the point of this was bonding, so. One car it is.

School finishes. Graduation comes. Stan only really talks to Ben in

person up until that day, when everyone is brought together for a group photo.

Even Mike shows up to watch them, which is nice, Stan has to admit. Bev's there, too. Her school let out a few days before them, and she'd returned to Derry that morning to see them all graduate. Well, Ben. Stan can't imagine she'd have shown up otherwise. Or maybe she would have. She seems happy to see them all.

"Everyone smile, come on!" Mrs. Tozier shouts at them to be heard over the loud crowd, a little annoyed at their inability to stand still and pose properly. "I'm taking the picture!"

It comes out blurry, and Eddie's yelling something at Richie, and Mike is looking down at his feet, and Stan's eyes are closed, and Ben is the only one smiling and ready for the photo. But Stan still saves it to his phone when he sees it uploaded on Facebook later that night.

The next morning is when they all plan to leave for Florida.

His dad doesn't want him to go, tells him he has so much packing and preparation to do before college. As if he's not just going to a college less than an hour away from Derry. It's hardly a journey across the globe. His mom pushes for him though, and a part of him is almost disappointed by her encouragement.

"It was so sad seeing you grow apart from your little friends," she tells him as she helps him pack that night. "Even that Tozier child, as much as he gave me headaches. Is he still... that way?"

"Very much so."

"Hm." She smiles anyway, putting a hand on her son's head, ruffling his curls. "I hope this is good for all of you."

Stan hopes so, too, he guesses.

He mostly still kind of hopes something happens that makes this trip not happen. And yeah, he feels bad about not wanting to go, and maybe the quarry meeting hadn't been quite as bad as he had expected, but he can't help but have anxiety about the whole thing. It's like he's running off with strangers for the summer. He doesn't

know them anymore. None of them know each other - not counting Ben and Bev. In what world is this a good idea? It's dumb, and he can't believe he's going along with it.

Backpack over his shoulders, wheeling a suitcase behind him, he shows up at Bill's house that morning. They all agreed to meet here at seven to get on the road early. Not surprisingly, when Bill lets him in and leads him into the kitchen, no one else is there yet. How is he the least enthused about this and still the most punctual?

"I talked to Mike a minute ago, Ben and Bev just picked him up," Bill tells him as Stan sits his bags down and slides into a chair at the table. The same table he used to eat waffles at after sleepovers, waiting for his mom to come pick him up, or for Richie and Ben to show up so they could all ride their bikes together. "So everyone should be here soon."

"Oh, good, good..." he replies awkwardly, fingers nervously tapping on the table.

"Um, coffee?" Bill asks, gesturing to the full pot on the counter.

"Yeah, please," he says, and can't help but wonder when Bill started liking coffee. He remembers being there when he sipped from his dad's mug for the first time and had nearly thrown up. They *had* been eleven, so maybe it's not weird that his tastes had changed since then.

He stands as Bill pours a cup for him, reaching for the sugar displayed on the counter. It's silent as they make their coffees. Not a terrible silence, but Stan still feels the need to fill it. He wishes he knew how. So he just sips and says nothing and waits for Bill to do it. Which he does, thankfully.

"You're gross," Bill says, so out of nowhere, that Stan nearly spits his coffee out. Bill grins.

"I'm sorry?"

"You're drinking that black," he explains. "That's disgusting."

Stan blinks. "I put half a spoonful of sugar in."

"Half a spoonful?" Bill crinkles his nose. "What's the point?"

"It does the job."

Bill just shakes his head. "Gross." He turns back to the fridge, putting away the creamer he had put in his own cup.

"At least mine's still coffee," Stan replies. "Yours is forty percent coffee, sixty percent cream."

"It does the job," Bill repeats Stan's previous words, smile playing at the corner of his lips. "And it tastes like hazelnuts, so. Sorry for enjoying my coffee."

"I enjoy mine!"

"Gross," Bill insists, laughing now.

Bickering about coffee isn't how he imagined his first one on one interaction with Bill to go, but he's not mad about it. He hadn't had very high hopes, truth be told. He doesn't know why. The way Bill had just shut him out - all of them out - he figured he had nothing to say to him anymore.

It's easy being with Bill. It always had been. Even as a kid, when the world was big and confusing, even more than it is now. Stan had always been able to find a sense of comfort and calm when it was just him and Bill. Richie had been his best friend, his longest friend, but Bill was something else. Something warmer. Stan had never been able to explain it. Not even now. It's kind of fascinating, how fast that initial anxiety dulls once the two of them sit down with their coffees. But also not surprising, because it's Bill. They talk, mostly about nothing - more lighthearted teasing, discussing what they did and didn't pack, wondering who is gonna find a way to get out of driving to laze about the whole time.

Nothing about the past, nothing about the reasons for the trip.

But it's enough to make Stan almost kind of not regret showing up. Not yet at least.

It's 7:18 when Eddie's mom drops him off at Bill's and Eddie joins

them at the table, rambling about how coffee isn't a sufficient breakfast and no thank you he doesn't want any, and it's 7:26 when Ben's car pulls up in front of the house. Stan and Eddie grab their bags to head out and join them. Stan grabs Bill's bag for him, too, as Bill runs upstairs to tell his parents goodbye before they leave.

Stan pulls the door shut behind him, following Eddie to the car. Ben pops the trunk for them, and they're putting their bags among the others when the back window rolls down and Richie flings himself over it. He strains his neck to look back at them.

"Congratulations!" he shouts at them. "One of you lucky fucks gets to sit in the very back with me."

Eddie glances at Stan. "Congratulations," he tells him, rushing to get into the car before Stan even has a chance.

"Fuck you, too!" Richie yells over his shoulder at Eddie, who Stan can't see but he assumes is sitting in front of him now. He looks back at Stan and stretches his arm out, holding his hand up. "Backseat buds!"

"Don't call us backseat buds," he says, but gives him his wanted high-five anyway.

Bill joins them just a minute later, and Stan finds himself squished in the very backseat between Richie and Bill. Not the worst seating arrangement, he can admit. Ben's in the driver's seat to start, Bev up front beside him, while Eddie and Mike are seated in the middle of them all, decidedly less pushed together.

"Everyone good to go?" Ben asks, looking back at them in the rear view mirror.

There's a jumble of noises, a few hollers of approval, a couple mutters, one loud "FUCK YEAH I AM" that's right in Stan's ear and makes him lean away, closer into Bill's side. It makes Bill laugh in his other ear and that - that's much nicer.

And with that, they're off.

2. Chapter 2

For some reason, Stan had expected the car ride to be a lot quieter. At least at the start.

Maybe that'd been stupid. But after so long of none of them talking, wouldn't someone expect more awkward silence? He must have forgotten who he was dealing with here. It's constant noise almost immediately.

Stan tries, at one point, to discuss a schedule with everyone for when they'll all switch out at the wheel - because he'd like to be prepared and not have people fighting about having to drive or how long they have to do it. But he gives up quickly. Everyone is yelling or singing and a water bottle is being launched across the car and hitting Bev in the head, and Stan rolls his eyes and sits back.

"Put something together, Stan!" Ben shouts back at him. "I trust you."

So he does. He pulls his phone out, does some calculations for how long the drive is, factors in stops for gas and food, and jots down all their names in a mostly random order. It's a long drive, but with so many of them, they only have to drive a few hours each.

"You don't have me driving in the middle of the night, do you?" Bill asks, and Stan looks up from his phone to see Bill peering over his shoulder at his list.

"Oh, um," he glances back down even though it's so fresh in his mind he doesn't really need to. "No, no, you're fourth. So it'll be like... after dinner?"

Bill's eyes stay on the phone. "It's nice of you to go last. I don't think anyone wants to be driving at 5am."

Stan shrugs. "Yeah, well.... It's alright. It'll be easier to drive when everyone's asleep anyway." They both laugh, knowing how true it is. "And I'd have felt bad putting myself in the best spot."

"Which is?" Bill asks. "What do you think's the best spot?"

"The first or second one. Get it out of the way. No one's asking for pee breaks yet, everyone's eaten already -"

Richie leans over to interrupt. "I haven't eaten."

"Almost everyone was smart and ate before," Stan corrects himself, and Richie nudges him with his shoulder in response.

"What time is it?!" Richie yells, as if he doesn't have a phone in his lap. "When can we stop for food? Can we get snacks? How come no one brought snacks?!"

"I brought snacks," Stan tells him, but doesn't offer any. He knows Richie will just make fun of his granola bars and "grandpa food" anyways. He did it when they were kids and it doesn't seem like much has changed where Richie's concerned.

"Most of us brought snacks, dumbass," Eddie says, turning around in his seat. "It's a 24 hour drive, you think we wouldn't come prepared?"

"You mean your mom didn't pack extra for me?" Richie asks, a hand on his heart. "And I thought we had something special." A bag of chips smacks Richie in the face and they all look to the front of the car where Bev is looking back at them, zipping up her backpack. "Thanks, Bev!"

"You got it, Rich," she says, turning back around.

Just when Stan thinks that potential delay has been adverted -

"I'm sorry," Mike shouts out. "But I really need to pee! Ben, can we stop soon?"

Bill's voice is low in Stan's ear. "You were saying something about the best spots?"

"Maybe I do have it," Stan decides, rolling his eyes as Ben takes the next exit.

The extra stop only puts them off track by a few minutes. Mike pees quickly, at least. He appreciates him for that. They stop again a little while later, after 11, when it's time to switch drivers. Bev stays in the

passenger seat - too lazy to move, she says - and Richie takes Ben's spot. They change seats in a McDonald's parking lot before pulling through the drive-thru for lunch.

Richie and Bev are laughing up front, Bev feeding him nuggets and fries so he can drive. Richie in the drivers seat, especially distracted, only stresses Stan out a lot. But he manages to not crash, even after he drops a nugget at his feet and insists on shoving his head under the seat to find it. By the time it comes for Richie and Bev to switch seats and Bev is behind the wheel, Stan finds himself much calmer. Calm enough to doze off a little, somehow able to tune out Ben's laugh and Eddie's howling and slip away.

He doesn't even remember falling asleep, but he wakes up to Bill gently shaking him. His eyes fluttering open, he realizes he's been using his shoulder as a pillow. Face turning a bright pink, he shoots up, embarrassed - but Bill's smiling at him. "Sorry," Bill says, as if he was the one who'd been drooling all over Stan. "I'd have let you sleep, but we're stopping for dinner and -"

"And you gotta drive," Stan mumbles, voice deep and gravely from sleep.

"Half asleep and still can remember the schedule," Richie says, draped over the seat in front of them. When had he moved from the passenger seat? How had Stan slept through three hours worth of chaos? "You only got more grandpa like as you aged, didn't ya, Stanley?"

Stan says nothing, rubbing his eye with one hand and using his other to give Richie the finger. Richie leaps across the seat, mouth open, trying to bite his finger. He gets shoved and ends up landing on Stan and Bill's feet.

They pull up to a Chinese restaurant, and as much as Stan thinks they should do another drive-thru to keep on good time, his stomach growls enough to make him not care. Inside, the hostess doesn't look thrilled to see a group of seven teenagers show up, and Stan gives a small smile of understanding. He gets it. He's still not sure he wants to be there either.

Dinner is as chaotic as one would expect, but they get through it within 40 minutes and are back on the road by 7.

"I'm about to fall into a food coma," Eddie moans, crawling into the very back seat and stretching out, laying on his back with his legs dangling off the edge. Ben lifts them so he can slide in, sitting with Eddie's legs draped across his lap. Bev sits beside him, grimacing at the feet in her lap, but letting them remain without complaint.

Stan gets into the back as well, only regretting that choice when he sees Bill getting into the front, forgetting he was driving now. He regrets it further when Richie sits beside him, taking the Eddie route and deciding to lay down, using Stan's thigh as his pillow.

"I'll just take the front because I am not being Richie's foot rest," Mike jokes as he gets into the car.

"We're supposed to be bonding!" Richie shouts at him. "I guess Stan my man is my only true friend after all this time."

"I mean, I didn't invite you into my lap," Stan points out. "I'm letting it happen but I want it on record that this was all your doing. This was forced upon me."

Richie's hand flies up, blindly patting Stan's face. Stan grabs his wrist to hold his arm down. "Oh, this dominance is kind of kinky," Richie grins.

Stan hears Bill laugh from the front and he blushes pink. He releases Richie instantly. "Go to sleep, would you?" he mutters.

"Yeah, would you?!" Eddie calls from behind them. "I have to drive soon and I want to take a nap. Shut up."

Richie starts to sit up, but Stan shoves him back down. It earns another quip about him being rough and kinky, but it prevents a bickering match between him and Eddie so he'll take it.

Eddie's the first to start snoring, and Richie falls quiet around the same time. Mike even appears to be taking a post-dinner nap in the front, head against the window. Stan, Bill, Ben, and Bev stay mostly silent to let them sleep, on their phones or talking in hushed

whispers, muffling their laughs. Ben tells a funny travel story about his first time going to visit Bev, Bill and Bev reflect on the school play they did together when they were eleven, Stan asks them if they remember the time they fought Henry Bowers with rocks. They all do.

He finds himself amazed at how easy it feels to all be together.

Eddie wakes up with twenty minutes to spare until it's his turn to drive, and immediately starts bitching at Stan for making his slot so late.

"I'm going to be driving until two in the morning, Stan!" he tells him as if he didn't make the list and isn't aware of the time slots. "I'm already a bad driver so if we crash and die because you have me on the road in the pitch black, I hope you know you'll be going to hell since it's directly your fault."

"All of us dying together would be so poetic though," Bev jokes, pinching Eddie's ankle. "Kind of romantic."

"Don't pinch me!" he yells, yanking his feet away and sitting up. "And I don't want to die with any of you."

"You mean the plan for the end of this trip isn't to drive off a cliff together?" Bill joins in. "I thought that was the whole point. One last hurrah."

Even though the start of that was all aimed at him, Stan stays quiet and lets them bicker lightheartedly. He's not desperate for sleep, but he's kind of tired still, and he knows he'll be starting his driving time around five. So if he doesn't sleep now, he probably won't. He shifts a little so he can rest his head more comfortably, trying not to disturb Richie, and closes his eyes.

He sleeps long enough and deep enough to dream. It's mostly nothing worth noting, really. He's walking along the kissing bridge and notices a mail truck following him, which is weird but dreams often are. Then when the truck gets closer, it's Richie driving, with Bill and Mike sitting beside him, and Richie is yelling at him trying to sell him ice cream. Stan runs home without even talking to them, and the

dream fades out there.

Nothing special, but he does realize it's the first time he's dreamed about any of them in a couple years. The six of them used to be reoccurring characters in his dreams, some more than others, and now they're back.

Mike's behind the wheel when Stan wakes up. He seems to sense Stan coming to and moving, because he looks into the rear view mirror to meet his eyes.

"Hey, man," he whispers. "You ready to switch in a minute?"

Not really, but Mike is yawning so Stan nods anyway. Mike drives for another ten minutes until he can pull over, giving Stan a little time to rub the sleep from his eyes. Gently, Stan gets up, careful to not wake Richie and make sure his head didn't smack against the seat.

"Hey, there's something waiting up there for you," Mike tells him as they're getting out of car to switch places. The first place Stan's eyes land on is Bill, fast asleep in the passenger seat. "Cupholder," he hears behind him. Oh. Right.

There's a cup of coffee sitting there. He picks it up and sips it. Not steaming hot, but warm enough, and really what he needs. Exactly how he likes it, too. "Hey, thanks," he says.

"Thank Bill when he wakes up," Mike says through another yawn.

Stan smiles. He'll do that.

With almost a full nights sleep and a cup of coffee now in his system, Stan feels pretty good, even at six in the morning. Everyone else is asleep, and the roads are practically empty. It's almost peaceful driving at this hour.

He's never actually been on a road trip before. Well, that's not true. But not as an adult, or even as a teenager. His family took a few trips when he was younger, and he went on spring vacation with the Toziers a couple times, but he was always a kid just tagging along for the ride. He was probably 11 the last time his family went anywhere.

He can see himself doing this more. Even just the feeling of driving away from Derry is freeing as hell.

The sun is rising in the sky, and a few of them start to move around. Bev buries her head into Ben's chest, hiding from the sun, and Ben pulls his hat down over his eyes. Richie grabs a hoodie - not his, but someone's - off the floor and puts it over his head and is snoring again in minutes. The only person who wakes up and stays awake is Bill. He's so quiet that Stan doesn't even know he's awake until he feels eyes on him and turns to look at him.

"Welcome to Florida," Stan whispers to him, smiling. Bill smiles back, sleepy and slow, and his eyes look heavy. Still more handsome than when Stan wakes up, that's for sure.

A little groggy still, Bill sits up, looking out the window at their surroundings. It's still just miles of highway and road signs. Kind of hard to tell they're even in a new state. "It's stunning," Bill yawns.

"Yeah, you sound stunned."

"Mmmhm." Bill raises his arms above his head, arching his back as he stretches. "I feel so inspired already," he says through yet another yawn.

Stan laughs. "Go back to sleep," he tells him. "We still have nearly two hours to go."

Bill's answer is quick and decisive. "No," he says, not even entertaining the idea. "Where are we?"

"We're in Florida. Do you listen?"

"Yes, I listen," Bill chuckles. "Where in Florida?"

"Oh, um, St. Augustine."

"Never heard of it."

"It's the oldest city in the US," Stan tells him. "Some Spanish explorer landed here."

"Mmm, tell me more, maybe I will go back to sleep."

So he does tell him more. "It was founded in 1565, I think? By-"

"I'm gonna stop you," Bill says, and Stan can't help but grin. He was wondering how far he'd let him go with that. Not long, apparently. That's fine, because that's about all he remembers from Geography class. "Because I don't actually want to go back to sleep."

"You should though." Stan tells him again, "You have a couple hours until we get to Orlando."

Bill shrugs and sits up more, reaching down to rifle through the backpack at his feet. "It's okay," he says when he emerges with a pack of mini muffins. "I'll keep you company."

"Oh. Okay."

He's not sure what his tone was like just then, but he regrets it immediately because it makes Bill backpedal right away.

"Unless you were serious about wanting to drive while everyone was asleep," he says, hands pausing in the midst of opening the bag in his grasp. "I know you like quiet."

"No, no, I wasn't-" Stan starts. "Well, I was serious. But, it's okay. Really. You're the exception."

There's a pause for Bill resumes his actions, ripping the bag open and popping a muffin into his mouth. He hands the next one to Stan. "I'm honored. Here's a gesture of my appreciation."

Stan takes it, examining it briefly - it's blueberry, the best kind of muffin - before eating it. He swallows before saying, "That would have been good with my coffee."

"Oh, yeah," Bill grins. "I'm glad you found that. Me and Mike were the only ones awake and I had to pee. And I told him to grab you one since I figured you wouldn't be going back to bed once we got there."

"Bold of you to assume I won't bail on group activities to take a nap," Stan says, and he sounds like he's kidding but he's absolutely not.

"You better fucking not," Bill laughs. "This whole trip is because of you."

Stan looks at him, incredulous. "What? It is not."

"What? Stan, it so is."

"It's because of... all of us. Don't blame me for this."

Bill pulls back a little like something's shocked him. "I don't think 'blame' is the word I'd use... But, dude, 'I want to try and make Stan's wish come true.' That's what Ben said."

Stan goes quiet for a moment. He still disagrees, but he had said that. But only because of what his wish had been. This probably would be happening regardless of Stan's wish or not, they'd still go as a reason to get out of Derry or whatever Mike and Richie's wishes had been. For some reason, he really doesn't like to imagine that his wish is the main reason they're doing this.

"You're wrong but I guess I won't take a nap," he mumbles, pauses, then adds, "Thanks for the coffee, by the way."

Bill hands him another muffin. "Of course."

It's 9:24 when Stan pulls up to their hotel. Richie and Ben are awake at this point, too, Richie coming to only half an hour after Bill. Ben not too long after that. They kept quiet to let the others sleep, not talking much anyway since they were still tired. It was mostly Bill and Stan whispering in the front for the last of the drive.

"Bev, we're here." As he parks, Stan can hear Ben whispering to the girl asleep on him, trying to wake her. "Hey, love..."

Stan is fine with waking everyone up gently, starting the morning off on a nice note. Richie has other plans. Flinging himself over the center console, he slams on the horn. Everyone jolts awake.

Mike shoots up so quick his head bounces off the roof of the car. "What the fuck," he mutters, still half asleep. "We okay?"

"Welcome to Florida, Mike!" Richie exclaims.

Everyone slowly perks up so they can look out the window. Much like when Bill got his first look at the state, there's not much to look at. Just the hotel, which is a big chain they have back in Maine, too. A Target and a Denny's across the street.

"Don't be too underwhelmed," Ben tells them all. "This hotel's website says the nearest beach is less than fifteen minutes away."

"Who's underwhelmed?" Richie sits back down. "I fucking love Denny's. Can we go get pancakes?"

They go get pancakes, but not before they get checked in, and have thirty minutes to kill before their rooms are ready.

It's at Denny's, once everyone has a plate of pancakes or waffles or bacon and eggs in front of them, that they start deciding who will sleep where. Stan knows what his preferences are, but he's all about whatever is easiest for everyone. Whatever makes sense. So he eats his waffles and listens to them debate.

"Ben and Beverly probably want their own room," Mike says.

"Ideally, yeah," Ben admits, but shakes his head. "But each room has two beds. So it makes sense for us to share with someone else. So no one else has to double up."

Stan nods. He's sure the couple wants their privacy, but them sharing a bed makes more sense than forcing Mike and Richie to, for example, or Stan and Eddie.

"Okay well, you two room with whoever, but me and Stan are gonna room together," Richie says as he stabs at his pancakes.

Stan looks at the boy next to him and blinks. He doesn't recall that conversation. "Are we?" he asks.

"Well, yeah? Don't we always?"

He opens his mouth, but finds he doesn't have a reply.

It throws him, the way Richie says that. Such familiarity. As if they've been going on trips together this whole time. As if the last few years hadn't been spent apart, with new friends. He has no ill feelings towards Richie - or any of them, but there'd still been so much distance. He was at least acknowledging it. He can feel it still, even when Richie is acting like they've been close as ever this entire time. He's not sure how to respond to it sometimes. It's not *hard* to be around Richie exactly, even after time apart, but there's hesitation, too.

"We haven't shared a room together since we were thirteen and you slept over at my house," Stan reminds him.

"Wow, you remember the exact date, too?" Richie jokes.

It was a week or two before he turned fourteen over Christmas break in 8th grade, so yes, he probably could figure out the exact date, but he doesn't say that. Just presses his lips together and lets Richie talk more. He's glad, at least, that he hasn't forgotten how to let anything Richie says slide off his back. Sometimes he sounds too mocking and from anyone else, Stan may take offense. But this is just Richie.

"You know what I fucking mean," Richie continues. He guesses he does. "So come on."

He sighs, gives in without much fight. "I don't care who I room with."

His eyes flicker over to Bill on their own accord. He maybe had cared a little.

Stan's sure he can get accustomed to sharing a space with Richie again quickly. He's surprisingly not too bad to bunk with. He doesn't wiggle much in his sleep, stays still and quiet once he's passed out, aside from the occasional, non-aggressive snore. And he stays out for fucking hours. Stan thought he had died once, he slept so long and didn't even as much twitch for hours. He was ten and thought he was going to have to go downstairs to tell Richie's parents that their son had passed away in his sleep.

That being said, a part of him maybe wanted to share with Bill. He's the only one he feels completely comfortable with again - and even

that's kind of a stretch. Even Bill gives him a weird kind of anxiety that makes him very self aware, but isn't he always? But they've been alone together, twice if their time as the only ones awake counts, and it's been good, and Stan would have liked to avoid awkward one on one time with yet another person. He knows he can be around Bill and be okay.

Plus, he knows how he likes his coffee, which could be important in a roommate.

But. Richie.

Richie's fine.

After Richie claims Stan as his roommate, the other room assignments kind of fall into place easily.

"I don't want to room with Ben and Bev," Eddie insists. "I don't trust they won't do something while I'm asleep and I don't wanna be exposed to anything."

"I'll room with you, Eddie," Bill tells him, then looks at Mike. "If you don't mind?"

Mike shakes his head. "Not at all. I'm happy to third wheel."

That settles that, and the next thirty minutes is spent stuffing their faces with breakfast and talking plans for their first day in Florida.

Stan had mentioned on the ride over maybe putting together some sort of schedule so they could at least try to manage their time wisely, but the entire group had shrugged him off. We'll play it by ear, they said. We'll go with the flow, they said. Well now they're sitting in Denny's arguing about when to go to Disney and Stan feels a little smug when Mike sighs and says, "Maybe we should have planned this better."

Goddamn right they should have.

Also, on the topic of Disney, Stan would rather do literally anything else. He doesn't say that, because he knows he'll be outnumbered 6 to 1 anyway, but he's never been the amusement park type. Long lines,

rides that make him want to piss himself, food that's not good enough to be as expensive as it is. He knows going is inevitable, so he'll suck it up and try to see what the hype is all about, but he doesn't have to like it.

But they won't do Disney on day one because, "It's already past ten and I want a full day," Bev insists.

Stan tries to hide the look of horror on his face. "Ten in the morning is too late to start a day at Disney? How long do you want to be there?"

She looks him dead in the eyes as she repeats, "A full day, Stanley. A full day."

Well, he has that suffering to look forward to soon, he guesses.

Disney aside, there's a long list of things Stan does easily get on board with. The beach, the space center, an aquarium, another beach, the wax museum, a couple other museums. Everyone came to Florida with one or two places they wanted to go.

Stan did, too.

"It's a wildlife refuge," he tells them. "They have trails, and you can see pigs and alligators and birds and -"

"Oh, so this is a bird thing," Eddie says, not sounding shocked in the slightest. "You still love birds, huh?"

Stan blinks. Bird watching was his main priority here, yes, but he didn't expect them to point it out. Not immediately anyway.

"You go to a new part of the world and you still wanna look at fucking birds," Richie shakes his head.

"They have other animals, too!" he defends.

"I don't wanna look at birds, we have birds in fucking Derry."

"Hey, the boy likes what he likes," Bev comes to his defense. "I don't get it either but -"

Stan turns to glare at her. "You want to hang out with sweaty college kids prancing around in fur suits, but you don't get why I like birds? Your judgement is not acceptable."

Her jaw drops just a little and she lets out a surprised, breathy laugh.

"Touche," she tells him, raising her fork to cheers him with a bite of pancakes.

"I don't care if you guys go with me," he says, and he means it. "I just want to go. I don't mind if it's just me. Actually -"

Before he can say he'd prefer going alone, someone's offering to go with him.

"We'll go bird watching," Bill says, not even looking up from his plate at first. Only after Stan has silently stared at him for a few long seconds does he glance up and smile. "I'd like to avoid gators, preferably, but birds are cool. And other animals, too."

"Yeah. Other animals, too."

"We're supposed to all stay together this week," Ben pushes. "Stan, we'll all come with you to watch birds."

Richie groans. "I think I'm sick that day."

"It's really okay," Stan says to Ben. "And think about it, all seven of us together all the time? That's not really realistic. We'll get sick of each other and I think that's the opposite of what's you want to happen." Ben opens his mouth again, but Stan puts a hand up. "We'll worry about it when the times comes and I want to go." He wants to go today, but he'll wait. He'll think of the group today. "Let's focus on the plan for right now."

It's quiet for a moment, Stan's words reminding everyone that they're not just a group of friends on a vacation together. Stupid wishes they made as kids pushed them here. And if they're supposed to use this trip to reconnect, forcibly being together 24/7 is definitely a bad idea. At least in Stan's eyes.

The moment passes, and Mike fills the quiet, "I don't want to push it

but, guys, I'm not gonna be able to stop thinking about the beach until we go."

And none of them can deny him of that.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

writers block and my perfectionism said 'fuck this story' but i powered through because i love it and you all have been so so so nice it's ridiculous.

WARNING!!! this chapter mentions homophobia and bullying and a slur is used once or twice in a flashback type of scene. not by one of the losers, but about them.

parts of this are very stozier/richie centric and i won't apologize. i wanted to get the richie/reddie details out there so bill and the readers are all in the loop as well.

enjoy the beach babes and multiple vine quotes.

It only feels right, that their first stop is the beach. They're in Florida, for god's sake. How can they not make it a priority? Stan's been to the beach before, but not in years, so as he digs his swim trunks out of his suitcase, he finds himself actually kind of excited. Him and Richie had just gotten into their room - which isn't directly next to any of the others, but it is close. Stan and Richie's room is just three down from Ben, Bev, and Mike's, and Eddie and Bill's is across and over one from that. Them being on the same floor makes things easier.

Richie spent time fucking around in the hallway with Bev and Mike, on the hunt for vending machines, so Stan got first claim on a bed. The one by the window, because he likes waking up to sunshine and birds chirping. If Richie cares, he hasn't said anything, just barreled into the room letting him know there are three vending machines on their floor - which is apparently very important to note.

"This hotel doesn't even have a mini bar," Richie says, opening their fridge to find it empty, then shutting it in defeat. "Wack."

"Wack," Stan repeats, glancing up from his suitcase. He means it to be

mocking of Richie's word choice, but Richie takes it as him agreeing.

"We'll find a way to get drinks, Stan my man, it's fine," he sighs. Before Stan can remind him they're all underage and can't easily access alcohol, he's changing the subject. "So is it true you're nailing Patricia Blum?"

Stan's eyes widen in surprise. Not that Richie may think that - most people did assume they were dating - but at the delivery of the question. "God, Rich," he shakes his head. "Ever heard of tact?"

"No. So, are you?"

He looks down again, re-zipping his bag. "Patty's just my friend."

"I heard she used to have the hots for you," Richie says in a stage whisper, like he's dropping a secret on him, but Stan already knew that. Though he certainly wouldn't phrase it as her 'having the hots for him,' Stan knew that Patty had had a crush on him when they first met.

She hadn't told him herself right away, but he picked up on it. Despite his lack of experience with dating at the age of 15, her friends directly asking him if he liked anyone and then what he thought of Patty within the same breath kind of tipped him off that maybe she liked him. Patty herself wasn't subtle about the flirtation either. He'd avoided answering her friends too honestly, just said he wasn't allowed to date, and that she was a good friend. No elaborations, just those two facts. The message, he assumed, was passed along and over time, he could tell she got over whatever crush she may have had.

She told him so for herself sometime during the second semester of their sophomore year.

"I can't believe I used to like you," she had said through a laugh, playfully rolling her eyes at him. He couldn't even remember why, or what he may have said or done to get that reaction, but he remembers he was laughing, too.

"Oh, you did?" He'd played dumb for her benefit.

But he hadn't needed to. She'd rolled her eyes for a second time. "Shut up, you knew."

And he had, but even knowing, it'd been difficult for him to accept. It was hard for him to imagine, her liking him. Or anyone liking him. Even now, but especially then. When he was more awkward than ever, long and gangly, a mess of curls, still getting made fun of relentlessly. Friendless. The stereotypical loser. And it's not like he's much different now. His curls are more tamed since he discovered hair product, and once Henry Bowers and his dickhead friends left, no one went out of their way to treat him like shit on a daily basis.

But he's still so far from cool, and he'd never ever describe himself as appealing to the opposite sex. Or same sex. Anyone.

It'd have been easy, to start dating Patty. It was true, his parents didn't like the idea of him dating so young, but if it was a nice Jewish girl like her? They probably would have made an exception. They'd probably have been proud, even. He disappointed his dad a lot, but settling down with a girl like Patty would have been something that'd have made him happy, he bet. And life with her would be fine, and he could be happy with that. But looking back, he's glad he didn't. Not just because it'd have been dishonest to her and himself, but because she's too good of a friend to risk losing. And he's not interested in losing anyone else.

"She got over it," he tells Richie, carefully moving his suitcase from the bed to the corner of the room. He'll unpack later, make use of the drawers by the TV, but he doesn't want to make the others wait too long.

"You mean those sweatervests didn't have her panties all so-"

"Beep beep, Richie!"

Richie stops, then smiles, putting a hand over his heart. "Man, it's been awhile since anyone's beeped me. Feels good, feels right."

Stan rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. "Get changed, trashmouth," he says, then disappears into the bathroom to change.

When he emerges, wearing his black swim trunks with a white t-shirt and sandals, Richie is laying on the bed in just his bright yellow trunks. He jumps back into conversation as if the five minute pause hadn't happened.

"How come you never got with her?" Richie pries. Stanley steps over Richie's clothes on the floor to put his away neatly into his backpack. "Didn't you take her to prom?"

"We just went as friends," he says. "I didn't see you at prom. Who did you go with?"

He's mainly asking to change the subject, because there's really nothing more to him and Patty, but he supposes he's curious if Richie took a date. He figures he went with friends, because Richie actually has a lot of those. *Friends*. Though Stan's not very fond of any of the guys Richie hangs out with. Not because they're the type who skip school more often than not and are disrupting class with unfunny remarks and pranks when they are there, but because they never seemed like they liked Richie. Not the real Richie. Stan doesn't know much about them, only hung out with them a few times before him and Richie distanced more from each other, so maybe he's wrong, or maybe things have changed. But they seem like the kind of guys who liked him when he was being Trashmouth, but not when he was just Richie.

They'd had a class together in junior year - Stan, Richie, and a couple of Richie's friends. Billy and Jon, he thinks it was. Richie got congratulated by the teacher as the only one to ace the last test. Everyone seemed shocked except Stan and Richie. Stan knew he was smarter than everyone thought. His friends had ragged him the entire class, calling him a nerd and teacher's pet and accusing him of cheating a couple times.

It wasn't the only example of this, but it's one of two that Stan remembers most. Richie's loud and funny and crude at times, but he's also wildly smart and more sensitive than he wants people to know. He doesn't think Richie found people who he could be open with, and it makes him regret not staying closer to him.

He seems fine though. Happy. Stan hopes that's true.

"Just some of the guys," he shrugs. "They bailed out early to go to some party though."

"No date?" Stan asks, wanting to get back at him for all the Patty talk.

"Eddie's mom said no," he replies easily.

Stan laughs. The jokes about Eddie's mom seem like second nature to him, his first instinct always to mention her, Stan almost wonders if he's missed making them. Almost wonders if he's missed the people he used to make them with.

"And you couldn't settle for anyone less, I get it," he plays along. He pauses for a moment, the subject of dating mixed with Richie's presence bringing back a random memory. "Remember when Bowers started that rumor that you and I were a couple?" he asks, and then when Richie's laugh is forced, regrets it.

None of the losers had been able to escape the gay slurs thrown at them over the years, because that was Henry Bowers' go-to insult. Whether or not he actually thought any of them were gay, Stan's not sure, but he thought it was offensive so he slung it at them as often as he could. It never went beyond that, just the slurs thrown at them as they passed in the hallway or he tried to swing on them. Not until sometime in the eighth grade, when he somehow convinced everyone that the reason Stan and Richie spent so much time together was because they must be dating. Stan's not sure how Ben got taken out of the equation, he was always with them, too, but whatever. He can't act like he understands how Henry's brain works. Nor would he want to. It was short lived, and Stan found it mildly annoying but no more than the usual torment he was used to, but he could tell it really bothered Richie.

And no one got it worse than Richie either - and that didn't stop after Bowers left. The rumors held more weight as they got older though, it wasn't just asshole, homophobic Henry Bowers calling him a fairy to try and hurt his feelings. It was kids Stan didn't even know in his freshman biology class, coming up to him and asking if it's true about Richie being gay. A girl in his homeroom during sophomore year telling the guy who sat in front of Stan that she heard Richie tried to

kiss some guy called Connor at a party. Junior year, Richie getting in a fight because some guy thought he was checking him out.

That was the other moment Stan realized he didn't like Richie's friends. The moment he decided that they weren't good people. He'd walked by them on his way to the bus that day of the fight, four guys surrounding Richie as he wiped blood from his lip.

"We know you're not some fag, man," one of them had said.

"Yeah, we won't let him get away with saying that shit about you," said another.

The first guy curled his lip. "Fucking disgusting."

Richie had said nothing, and avoided Stan's gaze and sympathetic smile as he passed.

Stan gives him the same smile now. "I wonder what Bowers is up to now," he says quickly to change the subject. He can literally hear Richie breathe out.

"Dude, fuck, so do I!" he tells him, sliding off his bed and coming to sit on Stan's instead. "He's not even on Facebook, I looked."

"Why would you look?" Stan asks. "You want that guy on your friends list?"

"Absolutely fucking not. But I wanted to do some light lurking. You're curious, too, so shut up."

He's right, so Stan does shut up. Henry was a piece of shit, literally a real life villain in Stan's eyes, and he one hundred percent seemed like the kind of guy who would be in Derry forever. Stan has no idea where he went, but after high school, he was just gone.

"I bet he's in jail," Richie decides. "That'd make sense."

"Oh, absolutely," Stan agrees easily.

He's not in jail. They're pretty sure. They spend the next twenty minutes on their phones, googling Henry and all his old friends, looking at public records, trying to crack the case. And while it doesn't shock them to see Henry, Patrick, and the rest of them had gotten in trouble with the law at some point, none of them appear to be locked up currently. Not in Derry, at least.

"I bet aliens got him," Richie says as he's a month down on Patrick's Facebook, looking for any mention. Patrick himself is still in Maine, but not in Derry. Not in the town Stan's going to college either, thank fuck. But no sign of Henry being with him.

"Yeah, that's the most likely answer," Stan holds back a laugh.

"I'm just saying, if they took him and not me, I'll be pissed."

Richie throws his phone across the bed and flops onto his back. Before Stan can unpack that, both of their phones buzz. Richie doesn't move for his own since Stan's is in his hand, and they know it's probably the group.

It is.

'beach time!' Mike's text reads. *'we're ready when you are!'*

Stan sees Eddie typing, and waits for his response to go through before sending his own.

'READY' Eddie sends.

'We are, too.' Stan replies.

Bev's message comes through next. ***'LOSERS ASSEMBLE!'***

He tucks his phone away and nods at the door. "Ready?"

Richie hops off the bed and Stan can hear a door opening and shutting from in the hall. Then, as he's grabbing his beach bag, hears another, followed by Eddie's voice. Stan and Richie step into the hall, and the others are already walking their way. They're all smiling and a bundle of excited energy as they pile into the car and start the short drive to the beach.

They don't exactly have the beach to themselves, but at least from a distance, it doesn't seem as crowded as he expected.

"WHO AM I?" Bev asks as they all run towards the sand - well, as all the boys run, and she's carried on Ben's back. "LET'S GO TO THE BEACH - BEACH -"

"NINKI MINJAJ!" Half of them yell, bursting into fresh laughter.

Nothing like vine quotes to bring a group together again.

They find a spot of sand big enough for them to put their towels down. Mike and Richie don't even wait, don't stop to properly lay their things out. Just drop them and run to the water. Bev is right behind them.

"Idiots didn't use sunscreen," Eddie mumbles. Stan looks over to see him sitting, rubbing the lotion over his legs. "Bev is definitely going to burn and she'll be miserable the rest of the trip."

"Toss it," Stan says, reaching out for the bottle.

"The only one with sense," Eddie says as he hands it over.

Stan huffs out a laugh and squirts the sunscreen lotion into his palm.

"I'll use it, too!" Ben says, playfully defensive. "Stan just got his hands on it first!"

Ben and Eddie ponder why they only have one bottle of lotion between the seven of them, Eddie saying they better buy more because he's not sharing the entire trip, and Stan half listens to them, half listens to Bev yelling excitedly at Mike, and Richie laughing as they swim.

"You need help?"

Stan looks over at Bill, sat on the towel beside him. "Hm?" he furrows his brow.

"Your back." Bill motions towards the lotion bottle.

Stan's thankful for the heat making his face pink already or else his blush may be more obvious. "Um, yeah. Please. Thanks."

Bill laughs. "So polite," he jokes, getting on his knees and inching over behind Stan. The lotion's cold on his skin, and it's really not that bad considering how hot it is, but between his heated back and Bill's hands, it warms up soon enough. He swallows hard and wills himself to not focus on hands too much, but each time Bill's hands slide a little too low or make too much contact with his sides, Stan has to clench his jaw.

He's glad that Bill decides to join in on Ben and Eddie's discussion while doing this, because Stan's not sure he could maintain a conversation right now. He takes a painfully long time to finish - how long does it take to rub in some lotion? Once he is done, Stan's both disappointed and relieved.

"Thanks," he mutters as Bill claps his shoulder and announces he's done. He wants to return the favor, just to be polite, but then Bill is standing up and pulling off his shirt and Stan is silenced. Then Eddie's telling Bill he needs to get some lotion on too and ordering him to get over there so he can help him, and Stan's chance is gone before he realizes.

His eyes have a hard time leaving Bill though, and he knows his gaze lingers a little too long but he can't help it. Somewhere in the last five years, Bill had filled out those broad shoulders of his and toned his thin frame. Stan's not sure how someone who doesn't play sports or even leave his house much got so goddamn fit, but he looks annoyingly good. Most of them seem to have grown up and into their bodies, he notices. Everyone noticed Ben's transformation, but he's not the only one. Eddie had signs of developing abs, which didn't surprise Stan much, knowing he was an athlete who did track. Mike's looking as muscular as ever, and Bev's always been beautiful. Meanwhile Stan still thinks he has the body of a noodle.

Even acknowledging how good everyone looks in their swimsuits, his eyes are still peeled to only Bill for some reason.

He guesses he can't really deny how attracted to Bill he is. Not after being unable to quit ogling him, and especially not after his reaction

to Bill's hands all over his back and shoulders.

Truthfully, his sexuality isn't something he thinks about much. Or at all. It's kind of been a recent discovery, after years of thinking he just hadn't met the right girl yet, or that he was still young and not developed in that area yet. But it's not like he's been drooling over many guys, either. There's been maybe one guy, a guy in his English class in junior year with blue eyes that made his stomach swoop, and then a couple of actors who managed to get his attention. But he knows what Derry is like, and he knows he's not going to get a boyfriend anytime soon anyway, so he just pushed any thought of it to the back of his mind. He's not in denial, he's just not thinking about it. Or doing anything about it.

It's not been a problem until... right now.

"Come on," Ben says, reaching down and tugging at Stan's wrist. He's thankful for the pull out of his thoughts. "Don't be the last one in."

He's the last to stand up and start running to the water, so he's the last one in, but it doesn't matter. He's smiling all the same.

Stan's fingers and toes are all prune-like when he emerges from the ocean, breathing heavy from laughing and roughhousing. He feels 12 again. Like him and the losers had just finished splashing around in the quarry for hours, screaming and climbing on each other's shoulders, Stan repeatedly trying to dunk Richie under, Richie shouting, "You can't kill me!" as he popped back up every time. They probably acted more childish than the actual children in the water, and it was kind of amazing how quickly they all reverted back to their old selves.

The feelings he expressed at breakfast, the ones he's felt since the start, are still there, but he's enjoying himself for right now. The others make it impossible not to.

He's the first to retreat back to the sand, laying on his back on his towel and closing his eyes. The sun feels amazing on his skin. He feels tired, but in a relaxed way rather than a drained one. He lays

like that until he hears Eddie shouting at one of them, "Wait, I'll go!" and then when Stan opens his eyes and squints against the sun, he sees him and Bev and Bill walking over. Once again, he's fixated on Bill, eyes trailing over his body as the water drips down it. He licks his lips and clears his throat as he sits up.

Bill plops down by Stan again, but Eddie and Bev only bend down to dig into their bags.

"We're gonna grab food," Bev tells him, retrieving her wallet. "Pizza good?"

Realizing she's asking him, he nods and smiles. "Yeah, pizza's good."

There's not many food options on the beach, but Stan knows none of them want to leave - and he doesn't either. And he doubts any of them could argue against pizza anyway.

She doesn't ask what toppings either of them want before her and Eddie are crossing the beach to get to the small hut, but he trusts her. If he thinks about it for a minute, he can probably remember all of their preferences, too.

"Did you see that?" Bill asks him, his voice not quite a whisper but still on the lower side.

Stan raises his brows. "Did I see what?"

"Right after you got out of the water," Bill says, as if that helps at all. "Richie and Eddie."

He still doesn't know what he means, but he can only imagine. "What happened?"

"I wish someone would tell *me* what happened," Bill shakes his head. "I suggested we play another round of chicken after you left and told Eddie to get on Richie's shoulders and they both got so tense. Bev changed the subject to getting food and Eddie hightailed it out of there with her."

Stan presses his lips together. Bev had moved before Eddie separated from the group, but he assumes Ben's told her everything.

"I know they've been going at each other, but they were always like that," Bill continues. "Is this different? I didn't think any of us were on bad terms."

"Oh, Bill," he huffs out a dry laugh. "I almost didn't show up on prom night just to avoid the Eddie and Richie tension."

Bill sits up a little more, leaning in, and Stan's breath catches in his throat. "I remember noticing that Eddie wasn't with you all much, but I didn't think anything happened."

It's not something Stan wants to relive, or talk about behind their backs - but he thinks Bill should be in the loop. He's the only one unaware.

"They had a fight," he tells him simply. "Eddie already wasn't hanging out with us as much - he'd gotten his first girlfriend."

"Oh, yeah, I remember that," Bill nods. "I don't remember her name."

"I don't either." It's almost funny, that their friendship with Eddie ended over a girl he can't remember the name of. "But he wasn't around as much, and him and Richie still bickered like usual - but sometimes it got a little too real. I can't remember now, but Richie said something at the quarry one day that Eddie just, snapped at. Richie fucking cried."

It was about his girlfriend, Stan's pretty sure he remembers that much. Richie never hid his annoyance at her, that at the time Stan thought was just him not wanting to accept someone else into their group. Eddie had pushed hard at first, bringing her everywhere with them, but she didn't fit with them well, and Richie's comments probably didn't help.

"I've never seen Richie cry before," Bill frowns. "I'm kind of glad I didn't have to."

"Yeah, I envy you not having been there. But yeah... Eddie stormed off and that was that."

"He just never talked to you guys again?"

Stan shrugs. "We didn't take it personally. We knew it was a Richie thing. And I mean, we were still civil after. Him and me, him and Ben. It wasn't all silence and all bad blood forever."

Bill's quiet for a moment, and Stan lets him be.

"I hate that I missed so much," he finally whispers.

I hate that you did, too, he wants to say but doesn't. "You should be glad you missed that," he says instead.

"Other stuff though. I missed Ben and Bev getting together."

Stan wants to frown but forces a grin. "Still jealous you missed your shot?"

Bill laughs. "I think I'll be okay," he says in a way that makes Stan actually smile, relieved. "Is there anything else I should know about?"

"I don't think so. I think you're all in the loop now."

"I don't want to fuck up and say the wrong thing again," Bill tells him, face so sincere it almost makes Stan sad.

He smiles and pats his shoulder. "You're good, man," he assures him. "Trust me, you didn't miss much. We didn't last much longer without you."

This doesn't have the affect he wants, making Bill's frown deepen instead of fade and Stan has a lot of regret, but thank god for Bev and Eddie showing up with food. Bill smiles up at them, at least.

Bev looks out at the water, waving the others over, and soon they're all in a circle around three pizza boxes and a few containers of fries and fried pickles and onion rings.

"Which of you nasty fucks wanted fried pickles?" Richie asks, making eye contact with Beverly.

"You know it was me so shut up," she snaps, putting one in her mouth, then throwing one at his face.

Richie shrieks when it lands on his bare leg, grabs it, and tosses it at Stan.

Stan shrieks, too. Not out of disgust, just out of surprise. He resists the urge to throw it right back, but he just politely hands it back to Beverly instead.

"Thanks, Stan," she laughs, but doesn't eat it, just sits it aside. He can't blame her.

If anything Stan said had dampered Bill's mood before, he seems back to normal by the time they're done eating. A heated pineapple on pizza debate takes over most of the meal because it's Ben's favorite and Bev was quick to tell him how disgusting he is, but they're all laughing in between arguments and insults. Most of them don't bother waiting thirty minutes to get back to the water after they eat, despite Eddie yelling after them that they're all gonna drown. Stan stays on his towel, not for fearing of drowning, but because he's too full to move.

Bill and Eddie are still there, too, sharing Eddie's towel and laughing about something Stan can't see because his eyes are closed. He really wants a nap now. Maybe he'll take one before dinner. Knowing he's moments away from dozing off, he forces his eyes open and rolls onto his stomach so the sun can warm his back - and so he can look over at Eddie and Bill. They're building a sandcastle.

Well, they're trying to.

"That looks like shit," he says casually.

Eddie scoffs at him. "We don't have any buckets or anything, okay? We're doing our best."

Stan can't say that's true. They're helplessly trying to mold dry sand. Did they even attempt to wet it? It's literally just a tall pile of sand. He laughs and buries his face in his arms. "Sorry, you're doing great then," he says, voice muffled.

"I've never even been to the beach," he hears Eddie tell Bill.

"You'd never be able to guess," Bill says back.

Stan's not sure how long they've been there, but the sun isn't as high in the sky anymore and everyone has worn themselves out in the water and are instead spread out on their towels. It's not difficult to come to the decision they should head back to the hotel. The clock in the car tells him it's past three when they pile back in. Everyone wants to shower and get into clean clothes, and Stan is prepared to race Richie to the room to get dibs on the shower first.

Richie has the same thought. They make eye contact as they step out of the elevator, and Richie books it down the hall. Stan chases after him. Richie beats him to the door, but he's cursing under his breath, losing his advantage because he can't find his key card. Stan's smirking as he pulls his from the front of his bag and waving it above his head.

"Ha!" Bev shouts, watching from a few doors down. Richie flips her off.

"I shower first," Stan says, still not opening the door yet.

"No!" Richie sighs. "That's not fair. I beat you to the door."

"Couldn't get in though, could you?" Eddie heckles, opening his and Bill's door.

Richie huffs. "Fuck you guys."

Stan laughs as he opens the door and quickly darts into the bathroom ahead of Richie.

It turns out Stan wasn't the only one who had been exhausted and wanted a nap. When he gets out of the shower and Richie moves into the bathroom after him, the group chat is full of messages saying they may sleep before dinner.

'I've been up for what feels like 100 years, I'm definitely taking one,' Stan tells them.

He's in bed, out like a light, before he can see any of the responses, and before he even hears Richie start his water.

It's a deep, dreamless sleep, and a damn good one despite it only being a few hours. Stan's not sure what wakes him up, because when he does open his eyes, the room is dark and empty. He rubs his eyes, which are still tired, but he feels like he should get up and figure out what's happening with everyone.

He takes his phone from the nightstand, looking at the time first. The post-nap disorientation has him feeling like it was the middle of the night, so he's relieved when it's just about to turn seven. Checking the group chat, he only has to scroll up a little bit before he sees a photo of him, curls in his face, lower lip pouted out in his sleep. It's the least flattering photo of himself he's ever seen.

He'll kill Richie.

'he sleep,' the accompanying text reads.

'Bill's sleeping, too,' Eddie had replied.

'Bev, too,' Mike had added. *'should we let them?'* A minute later, he messaged again. *'Ben says we should.'*

He skims through the rest, just to figure out where they went and where they are now. Bev seems to be awake now too, texting them less than an hour ago. It looks like that's where they all are now, in the trio's room. He debates heading over there, and a part of him wants to, but he also doubts he'll get much alone time on this trip again and he kind of wants to take it while he can.

He's liked being with the others, more than he had thought, but he's still Stan. He cherishes his moments of quiet and peace. Staying in bed for now, he decides to lay there until he's woken up a little more and isn't so drowsy from his nap, then he'll join the others again.

Instead, he falls back asleep.

A couple hours later, he's sitting up in a panic, once again afraid he's slept until a weird time. This time when he looks around the room, he's not alone. The red numbers on the digital alarm say 9:06, and

there's a human sized lump under the covers of Richie's bed. He's not happy about sleeping so late, but at least it's not midnight or something. Although he does debate going back to sleep and hopefully staying that way until morning, his growling stomach tells him he needs to find food before he thinks about anything else.

He can see Richie turned in early, and he once again lurks the group chat to see if there were any signs of if the others had as well.

He groans when he sees the very last message is from half an hour ago, another goddamn photo of Stan asleep, with the message, '*oh my god he fuckin dead*' from Richie. Stan's actually going to kill him. He should do it now while he's asleep, so he'll go quietly.

'Why the fuck was I part of a photoshoot while I slept?' he texts to the chat.

When he comes back to his phone after going to the bathroom, there's no response there, but he does have a message from Bill.

'You awake now?' it reads.

'Yeah, I'm awake.'

No reply, but Stan hears a door open in the hall. A second later, there's a light tap on his door. It doesn't take much to guess who it could be.

Opening the door, he comes face to face with Bill, who is holding a white takeout box. He pushes it into Stan's hands and says, "You slept for six hours."

"That's not true."

"It's true."

"I slept for three and a half hours then woke up... then fell asleep for another two."

Bill smiles, clearly holding back a laugh. "That's not better."

"I didn't mean to fall back asleep," he says.

"You were tired, it's okay. You did warn me you'd bail on us to sleep."

Stan laughs. "I didn't mean to," he says again.

"They all went to eat without us," Bill tells him, which Stan knew. "Ben brought Bev food back but we were left to fend for ourselves."

"Wow, thanks, Ben," Stan scoffs, but he's smiling.

"I waited to see if you'd wake up and wanted to go out with me, but you took too long."

Stan's palms get a little sweaty at that phrasing, and he mentally kicks himself for allowing himself to fall back asleep.

"I got you a grilled cheese," Bill tells him. "Do you still like grilled cheese?"

He smiles wider. "Yeah, thank you." It was his favorite as a kid, he's surprised Bill would remember.

"I was gonna send it back with Richie but I didn't want him to take credit, or forget to tell you or something."

"You could have texted me," Stan laughs.

Bill shrugs, smiling. "Could have," he says, taking a step backwards. "I'm going back to bed. Eat and try to sleep again too, okay? You'll need it."

"Oh no, why?"

He's afraid he knows the answer.

"Disney at 7."

Stan groans, and Bill chuckles as he gets to his room. "Your photoshoot was stunning, by the way," he calls out before opening his door. Stan just blushes, and Bill's gone before he can even think of a reply.

Author's Note:

hit ya girl up at haderenthusiast on tumblr!